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METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR ORDERING GOODS, SERVICES AND CONTENT OVER AN INTERNETWORK

Abstract of the Disclosure

A billing system is provided that allows a consumer to order products from computers connected to the Internet, wherein the consumer is automatically billed for the ordered good or service by its telephone service provider. The billing system comprises a plug-in component (52, 52'), a billing server component (62, 62'), and in some embodiments, a merchant session gateway component (65). When a consumer orders a product over the Internet (20), the plug-in component (52) of the consumer's computer (42) establishes an Internet connection to a billing server (34) located elsewhere on the Internet (20) to order the product. In a first embodiment, the billing server component (62) of the billing server (34) transfers an encrypted version of the product to the plug-in component (52). The plug-in component (52) then disconnects from the Internet (20) and establishes a point-to-point (PPP) connection with the billing server (34). During the PPP connection, the billing server component (64) transfers an access key assigned to the order to the plug-in component (52) so that the plug-in component (52) may decrypt the product. The consumer is charged a unit rate or "drop-charge" for the product by the telephone service provider when the PPP connection is established using a premium telephone number assigned and administered by the telephone service provider. In a second embodiment, the consumer is charged a per minute rate for his or her time spent accessing the product, rather than a drop-charge. In the second embodiment, the billing server component (62') transfers a premium telephone number associated with the ordered product to the plug-in component (52') rather than an encrypted version of the product. The plug-in component (52') then establishes a PPP connection with the billing server (34) using the premium telephone number during which the consumer's computer (42) downloads the ordered product from a merchant server (39) located elsewhere in the Internet (42). The consumer is then billed for the ordered product based on the duration of the PPP connection established using the premium telephone number. Prior to downloading the ordered product, the merchant session gateway component (65) provides the plug-in component (52') with the information necessary for locating and accessing the ordered product.